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Book Reviews

The Common People of Ancient Rome. Studies of Roman Life and Literature. By FRANK FROST ABBOTT. New York: Scribner, 1911. Pp. ix+290. \$1.50.

We are under renewed obligation to Professor Abbott for this companion volume to his well known *Society and Politics in Ancient Rome* (1909). The new series is unlike the former in this regard, that only one essay, "The Origin of the Realistic Romance among the Romans," has previously appeared in print. It might be remarked in passing that this and the two concluding sketches, "A Roman Politician, C. Scribonius Curio," and "Gaius Matius, A Friend of Caesar," have but a remote connection with the title of the book. The general contents would have been better, though perhaps less attractively indicated, by the sub-title, "Studies of Roman Life and Literature."

The book is addressed to the layman, and little knowledge of Latin and history is presupposed, so little that Professor Abbott writes even for those readers who will "miss" such items as potatoes, tobacco, tea and coffee among the articles of food listed in Diocletian's edict (p. 122). The specialist will find little that is new, but that is no matter. Much good can be done now-a-days for the cause by essays such as these, which show that there are at least some phases of classical studies within the comprehension of the man on the street. It has always seemed strange that Englishmen and Americans have contributed so little, as compared with continental scholars, to the literature on social and economic problems in antiquity. In this country that may be due to a feeling that the classics stand as a protest against the prevalent commercialism, with which any kind of compromise may be dangerous; hence the drift of our scholarship toward linguistics, syntax, literary criticism, archaeology, and private life. These books of Professor Abbott, together with similar studies in the past two or three years, by Davis, Oliver, Radin, and others, may help to prevent an alienation from the *Zeitgeist* so complete as to have elements of danger in it.

The presentation of the subject-matter is logical without being too obtrusively systematic. The treatment is fresh, sometimes playful, but uniformly dignified. The style is direct and in the main clear; sometimes almost colloquial. Still in these days when the *manie de briller* is nearly epidemic, it is refreshing to find a quietly written book that is not merely based on broad and sound learning, but, with commendable sobriety, eschews all phrase-making and fine writing.

The first essay tells graphically of the processes by which Latin became the language of the world, i.e., of the West and North. So lucid is the explanation offered that to call it "one of the marvels of history" (p. 6) appears something

of an overstatement. Had anything else happened it would have been strange indeed. Perhaps too much space is given to Grober's untenable colonization theory, but Professor Abbott is eminently candid in his treatment of views opposed to his own, and that quality is not yet so common as to have become reprehensible.

The second essay, on the language of the common people, is an admirable example of Professor Abbott's way of making attractive a subject which most readers would have expected to find dry enough. The next, on the poetry of the common people, treats types and specimens of their dedicatory and ephemeral verses. The numerous translations are faithful, but somewhat unimaginative. Those in verse are not always fluent. The author may have felt the danger here of rising above the level of his originals, which indeed would not have been difficult. In writing of the realistic romance Professor Abbott has given a candid presentation and critique of all possible theories, coming to the conclusion that the whole truth lies with none of them.

The next three essays treat vital questions of social and economic welfare. Professor Abbott shows an unsympathetic disposition toward what he calls "paternalism," with which he apparently regards socialism as identical, or at least closely related. Thus he calls the latter "state philanthropy" (p. 147) and speaks of the corn doles as a "socialistic policy" (*ibid.*). It need scarcely be pointed out that such is not exactly Marxian socialism. In these papers he treats of the edict of Diocletian on the cost of living, the social and economic effects of private benefactions on a large scale, and of corporations.

Large portions of the edict are translated and a comparison is drawn with the present cost of living in England and America. The gradual decline in economic prosperity which is characteristic of the later Empire, Professor Abbott is inclined to ascribe in large part to the evil effects of the system of private benefactions. The important question, how it came about that all wealth and power fell permanently into the hands of a few to the ruin of society as a whole, is not raised. Of the abominable oppression of capitalism run mad, finally encompassing its own ruin by destroying those whom it exploited, there is not a word.

The last two papers are biographies; the first deals with the career of the able but unscrupulous Curio; the second is a character sketch of Matius, and mainly a translation of the well-known epistles, *Ad Familiares* xi. 27 and 28.

Touching as these essays do upon so many phases of life, it is natural that there should be points upon which one could wish further light, or where one will disagree in part with the conclusions here presented. As examples of some of the smaller questions that come to mind, one might feel that it is pressing somewhat the evidence from Epitaphs, which are necessarily benevolent or else silent (*Nil nisi bene de mortuis!*), to assert that "the common people still hold to the old standards of morality and duty" (p. 86). Is it entirely true that Latin "lost in vigor under the influence of the Greeks" (p. 102)? Are the Twelve Tables and Livius Andronicus really more vigorous than Plautus,

Sallust, Tacitus, or only *ruder*? In drawing comparisons between the cost of living in ancient times and today, one could wish that other features than mere food values had been considered, as for instance, the comparative cost of clothes, fuel, dwellings, entertainments, the baths (a species of club-life), etc. It is likely that the fear of being thought *immunis* (Plautus, Trin. 350 ff.), and so arousing the possibly dangerous hatred of his fellow-citizens, had quite as much influence in stimulating private benefactions as did the feeling of "responsibility" (p. 192) resembling Mr. Carnegie's *noblesse oblige* for millionaires. It is probable that the cabmen at Tibur chose Hercules as their tutelary deity (p. 230) because he was the special guardian of travelers to whom they offered the sacrifice *propter viam* before setting out on a journey (cf. Sonnenschein on the *Rudens*, v. 150).

The printing is excellent; the form of the book attractive. Misprints are few. I have noted *bletat* for *tablet* (p. 102); *employers* for *employees* (p. 230); possibly *cast* for *caste* (p. 219), unless this is a solitary instance of "reformed spelling."

The work is one that every teacher of Latin should have in his library. It cannot fail to furnish many a fresh and interesting point of view in high-school and college classrooms. All friends of the classics will join in expressing the hope that, after all, Professor Abbott will not allow the recent action of the trustees of the Carnegie Foundation to rob us of those studies in the history of paternalism among the Romans, which he had at one time planned to write after retiring upon an allowance from that institution.

W. A. OLDFATHER

Greek Tragedy. By J. T. SHEPPARD. Cambridge: University Press, 1911. Pp. vi+160. \$0.40.

According to the preface, "this book does not pretend to be a summary of known facts relating to Greek tragedy. Nor is it, except incidentally, an essay in critical appreciation. Its aim is to help modern readers to enjoy Greek plays." This purpose is, however, curtailed in many directions; for example, in reference to Sophocles' plays the author states: "I have not attempted to summarize the religious and moral teachings which are implied in these dramas; nor have I discussed at length the treatment of plot and chorus or the characteristic use of what is called 'tragic irony.'" (p. 121).

A marked feature of this manual is the caution with which the writer escapes personal responsibility for his opinions upon mooted points. Thus, concerning Thespis he says, "evidence is confusing, theories are numerous and too confidently maintained" (p. 4). On p. 7 he puts his conclusion concerning the origin of tragedy in the form of a question. After alluding to Ridgeway's theory, he dismisses the matter in this noncommittal fashion: "Still it is possible to underrate the Dionysiac element in the making of drama" (p. 8). The Athenian audience, he thinks (p. 20), "perhaps, though not certainly, [contained] women as well as men." The explanation of Aeschylus' *Suppliants*